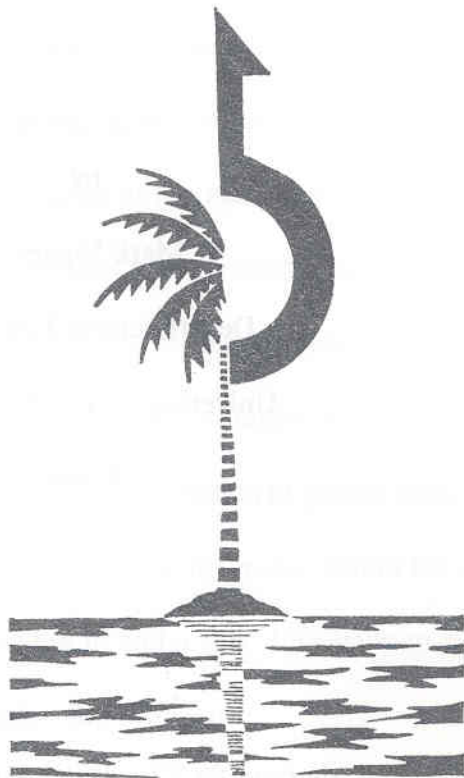


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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF CARIBBEAN MASCULINITY: TOWARDS A RESEARCH
AGENDA - A SYMPOSIUM**



"Male Privileging and Male Academic Performance in Jamaica"

by

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MALE PRIVILEGING AND MALE ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN JAMAICA

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at academic underperformance as one aspect of maleness in Jamaica and seeks to ascertain the extent to which this underperformance needs to be understood in relation to the historical privileging of the male gender.¹ The ideas presented here are exploratory in nature and represent work in progress. The essential thesis that I put forward, relates the current academic underperformance of male Jamaican students to the historical privileging of the male gender. Male academic underperformance in Jamaica is linked to gender socialization practices which are rooted in male gender privileging and reinforced by other tendencies in society that also have roots in the historical privileging of the male gender. These latter trends include the tendency: for female dominated professions to be relatively low status and low paying, for men to get higher pay for the same work, and for women to need more qualifications than men to hold the same job. My conclusion is that a solution to the problem of male academic underperformance must be sought in the transformation of gender relations and not in any special measures that would create new exceptionalities for males within the education system. To go the latter route would in fact be seeking to add a new dimension to male privileging and could ultimately exacerbate rather than solve the problem.

I take it as a given that historically the male gender has been privileged in Jamaican society. That is the male gender has controlled a broader and more powerful social space in practice regardless of the respective power potentialities of the genders in history. In taking this position I wish to make it clear that my reference to male privileging is always to the heritage of the 'old' privileging of the male gender unless I specify otherwise. My argument is not dependent on an assessment of the current state of gender privileging whether taken globally or with respect

to specific social spheres. My argument is that the historical structure of male privileging has been a major factor in bringing us to the point of male academic underperformance.²

The increasing tendency of males to lose ground in academic fields where they had previously dominated is part of a process of cumulative causation in which cultural patterns rooted in the historical privileging of the male gender play an important role. Based on male privileging, certain patterns of gender socialization of boys have developed that tend to leave them deficient with respect to skills that are increasingly required for survival within the educational system. In addition the process of adjustment that has taken place in the last two decades has seen a qualitative leap in the feminization of education and a radical reduction in the status of education as an enterprise.³ Factors connected to gender socialization and the place of education in society provide us with many indicators as to why males are likely to increasingly lose ground in the academic sphere. In addition there are a whole range of motivational factors to be considered that relate to the relative importance of an education to the social advancement of males and females.

In what follows I draw on a wide range of research to support my argument. Given the early state of the work I do not always provide full documentation but simply allude to research that is ongoing by other scholars.⁴ Where my investigations are incomplete I make reference to ongoing research which needs to be assessed. I also believe that it is important to go beyond the academic discourse to see what is being said in other areas such as the press, policy documents and speeches by public figures. I present this work with the hope that it will

stimulate others who have been working in this field (or who I might be so bold as to say should be working in this field) to come forward and publish their conclusions. There are ideas that are bandied about in our society that have the possibility of becoming conventional wisdom in some circles but which cannot stand up to even a modicum of scrutiny. It is time for those who know better to respond with a strong voice. Gender issues in the Caribbean are extremely complex and often exhibit a texture that is somewhat different from those identified by gender scholars in other regions. The issue of gender in education in the Caribbean deserves greater attention and more informed analysis than it has received to date.

In what follows, I start with an examination of some of the statistical evidence available and demonstrate that although females are out performing males in terms of overall numbers, a more detailed analysis of the statistics reveals the footprint of the old male privileging. Second, I look at gender socialization issues. I consider the expectations that boys face as well as the tasks that they are given at home and show how these do not prepare them well for schooling, especially as it has developed in Jamaica. Third, I interrogate the processes that are taking place inside the schoolroom and seek to show how these may be contributing to male underperformance. Fourth, I turn my attention to the impact of motivational and other factors beyond the school, in particular the prospects that males and females face in their efforts to realize a career that provides a high income, social prestige and self fulfillment. I conclude starting with an indication as to how the transformation of gender relations and the reform of the educational system might be to the benefit of all concerned. This is followed by some suggestions for further research.

THE STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

Jamaica's recent educational statistics demonstrate that, at all levels, females now out perform males in a wide range of areas, including some disciplines formerly dominated by males. That is, at all levels of the educational system we find more women gaining entry to courses of study and completing these courses successfully, often with higher levels of achievement.⁵ If we were to take an uncritical look at the global picture we might even conclude that women have finally overcome their age-old disadvantages at least in one area of achievement and are now in fact dominating academically educational field. In my view this conclusion would be premature. A closer look at the data reveals the stamp of historical male privileging.

There are a number of data sets that can be examined from a gender perspective. A number of these have in fact been analyzed.⁶ At the primary level there are the global Common Entrance Examination scores and the three individual papers, mathematics, mental ability and English. In addition those subjects in the primary school curriculum, social studies and science, that are not examined, have also been analyzed. At the secondary level, the CXC, O'Level and A'Level have been subject to some analysis again with attention being paid to particular subjects. The performance of children in single sex versus co-educational schools has also been a subject of study. At the tertiary level, the statistics for most institutions are available for study.

For this paper I have only looked in detail at the data for UWI. In recent years, approximately 70% of those graduating from UWI have been women. This situation has brought about a number of expressions of concern from male opinion leaders and even from female gender

theorists. See for example comments by the UWI Chancellor Shridath Ramphal [1993, 1994, 1995], Errol Miller [1986, 1991], Donovan Simon [1992]. Raymond Forrest [1995] Carl Wint [1993, 1993a], Elsa Leo-Rhynie [1993]. Miller's approach has been to see the issue in terms of the victimization of the black male and Wint has called for "a study to determine the status of young men" in Jamaica as a necessary first step "before we can begin to plot a strategy to improve the status of men [1993a]." A number of calls have been made that in fact suggest that the way out of this problem is to give male students and even male staff special breaks within the educational system.

An uncritical look at the global picture at UWI could lead us to conclude that men in fact are being marginalized, but a richer analysis tells a different story. Before conducting the analysis I am unable to restrain myself from making a polemical point. It is interesting that the emergence of women as a significant majority within the graduating class at UWI has been the occasion for a number of persons to speak of impending social doom. One of the clearest statements of this has come from Raymond Forrest [1995; 7]. "No society can function effectively if this huge imbalance persists". Strangely no one seems to have wondered how Caribbean society functioned when the balance was going the other way nor have these persons stopped to wonder how large parts of Asia and Africa function where the balance goes the other way.

Indeed those who are foretelling impending doom seem unaware of even more glaring gender imbalances against women that exist at the top of the academic pyramid at UWI. Moreover,

women have for decades dominated certain fields at UWI, while men have dominated others. This apparently was not a problem until women seemed poised to dominate the prestige fields as well. It seems that certain persons can only become gender sensitive when women are successful in a field traditionally dominated by men; the absence of women from a high prestige, male dominated field like engineering or the absence of males from a low paying female dominate field such as nursing, evokes no gender comment. It would appear that male chauvinism is alive and well and that the struggle for real gender equality has a long way to go.

In 1994/95 (provisional data) women represented just over 60% of students registered in UWI as a whole.⁷ This is the first year that female registration rose above 60% at UWI. Male registration was over 60% for all the years form 1948/49 until 1971/72. Female registration only went above 50% for the first time in 1982/83. In the case of Jamaican students the picture at UWI is slightly different. Taking all three campuses together women have been the majority among Jamaican students since 1974/75. (In that year, they represented 51% of all first degree, certificate and diploma registrations.) What we need to ask is, How was this majority achieved? In what follows, unless otherwise stated, I am referring to the registration of Jamaican students on all three campuses, not students at the Mona campus and not just Jamaican students at the Mona campus.⁸

To achieve 50% of first degree registrations as a whole women had to reach nearly 80% of first degree registrations in the 'low prestige' areas of arts and education while being 40% or less in the 'high prestige' areas of law, medicine and natural sciences. In the case of engineering and

agriculture women were less than 4% and 20% respectively. Only in social sciences were women 50% and this was accomplished by being over 86% of the social work class. Registrations for certificates and diplomas followed a similar pattern. Unfortunately I did not have the data for higher degree registrations disaggregated on a gender basis.

By 1983/84 female students had made gains in most if not all faculties to achieve an over all majority of 54% in terms of first degrees, certificates and diploma registrations. The most significant changes with respect to first degrees came in the faculties of law, agriculture and engineering where female registrations were 54%, 35% and 10% respectively. The picture with respect to certificates and diplomas was more complex with women losing ground in some of the more traditional areas such as education and social work.

Between 1983/84 and 1993/94 we see the dominance of female registration in the more arts based areas extended from arts and education to include law and social sciences. A rough parity was achieved in the faculties of medicine and natural sciences while agriculture and engineering lagged behind. The certificates and diplomas tended to follow the pattern of the more arts based faculties. This is not surprising given that the vast majority of the certificates and diplomas are outside of the natural science based faculties. These courses are shorter than the first degree and therefore they produce a disproportionate number in the graduating class. This is one reason that the graduating class appears even more feminized than total registrations would suggest.

What the figures for certificates and higher degrees suggest to me is that women require more education than men to get ahead professionally.⁹ Given their first jobs in areas such as the clerical and secretarial field they have to study again to move on in a male dominated world of work. This explains their dominance of the certificate programmes. Their male counterparts do not need further qualifications to get ahead [CGDS 1995]. Even with a first degree women fall into the same problem, they find it necessary to return to get a diploma or masters degree to get ahead. If women were doing higher degrees to climb to the top of the academic ladder they would have long dominated the staff at UWI.

The gender breakdown for registrations for higher degrees was only available from 1987/88. In this year women constituted 63% of registrations as against 57% for first degrees, diplomas and certificates. Over the next five years there was some variation but no clear trend with respect to the difference in registrations at the undergraduate and higher degree levels. This data must be looked at in relation to the gender breakdown of the staffing at UWI, Mona where Jamaicans constitute just under 70% of the academic and administrative staff (1993/94). Education is the only faculty in which women constitute the majority of the academic staff. This is a professional faculty where the feminization of the profession is so well established it would be hard for it not to be so. Nursing education, library studies, librarianship and administration are the fields in which we find gender equality or a majority of women at UWI Mona. But even in disciplines that have long been feminized the dominance of males sometimes persists especially at the top. My guess is that women have been the majority of students in the arts since they were introduced in the 1950s. Among Jamaican students, women have constituted

approximately 80% of registrations since 1973/74 (the first year for which I have data). Yet in 1992/93 they still only represented 42% of the Mona academic staff (all nationalities) and at the professorial level they represent 17%.

The data I have presented above suggests a similar pattern to the one identified Whiteley [1995] in his analysis of registration and passes for science subjects. What his work indicates is that behind the veil of equality evident in the relative parity of registrations in the natural sciences is a significant gender bias. Whereas women dominate in biology and achieve more or less equality in chemistry men clearly dominate in physics. His ironic comment on the extent to which these realities are understood is worth quoting at length.

That there is far to go [with respect to sensitizing educators] may be inferred from the comment of the Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences ... that there was 'no problem' ... because, overall, the registrations were approximately equally male and female. His views are reportedly shared by most of the faculty in the Department of Physics (all male); it is also noteworthy that in, 1993/94, 67 [80%] of the 80 faculty members in the Faculty ... were male [1995; 10].

Now that women are beginning to challenge men in the prestige disciplines it is seen by some to be a national crisis. The fact that women have long dominated the arts and education was never such a problem. Calls are going out for male role models for boys in the school system. But years of female underperformance at the highest academic level even within fields they dominate has never led to calls for serious analysis of the problem or special measures to provide women with role models at the highest academic level.

What the statistics show is that the gender bias against women is still intact. The real gender imbalance at UWI is not at the level of student admissions or graduates at Mona or with respect to the registration of Jamaican students. It is at the level of professorial appointments on all three campuses. In 1993/94 for the whole university 7% of the appointments at this level were female. If we want greater gender balance at UWI we can start by appointing more women at the top and persuading males to go into fields like nursing where women constitute the overwhelming majority. We might also consider appointing more women in agriculture and engineering as well as persuading more women to register in these fields. In 1992/93 of the 102 members of staff in these two fields 9 were women and female registrations represented 17% of first degree students. Meanwhile women represented 94% of nursing registrations and all the staff as far as I am aware.

The situation at UWI appears to be paralleled by the situation at the University of Technology, Jamaica (formally the College of Arts Science and Technology, CAST). Data quoted by Carey [1993] indicated that "men were the majority in Architecture, 66%; Building, 88%; Engineering, 96%, while women were in the ascendancy in Commerce, 66%; Hospitality and Food Science, 89%; Science and Health, 69%; [and] Technical Education, 68%". The data for tertiary institutions in Jamaica does not show a take over by women. What it shows is that education remains extremely gendered. My own hunch is that a very large portion of the gender transformation can be explained by the fact that the overall level of performance is falling throughout the Jamaican educational system but that performance of the boys is falling much

more rapidly. So that while women may be performing slightly below the level they were achieving two decades ago men are performing far below their former levels.¹⁰

I would suggest that one of the weaknesses in the analytic perspective on gender in the Jamaican educational system to date is that there has not been enough attention paid to the dynamic process of transformation in the performance of each gender in terms of understanding what has accounted for changes within the gender as apposed to cross gender comparisons. A useful line of research would be a study of each gender on its own; to try and understand what is happening over time to its educational performance against an (impossible to obtain) unchanging standard as far as is possible to establish one.

One of the reasons for the more rapid fall in overall performance in certain boys schools can be traced directly to gender bias. The exodus from the teaching profession often took with it the most capable male teachers and administrators. This meant that the most capable teachers and school administrators who remained were women. Gender bias prevented these women from becoming the heads of boys schools. This left some of Jamaica's leading boys schools with less than ideal heads. It should be noted that this bias also operates throughout the entire co-educational system. As the conditions in the schools have become more difficult for students and teachers alike there are reasons why the performance of boys should deteriorate more rapidly. These I suggest are rooted in part in the process of gender socialization.

GENDER SOCIALIZATION

My essential argument is that male under performance in the Jamaican educational system is rooted in the historical privileging of the male gender. The problem is a serious one and requires attention but not in terms of its symptoms, but rather in terms of its root. One of the root causes is to be found in the way in which Jamaican children are brought up and the expectations that surround them. The extreme gendering of Jamaican children is the starting point for male academic underperformance. That boys are naturally bad and girls are naturally good, is a widely shared operational principle even amongst fairly sophisticated persons who may well be otherwise quite gender conscious.

From day one, therefore, boys and girls are treated differently in this self fulfilling conception. In the home boys are expected to misbehave while girls are expected to conform to a rigid code. If a boy misbehaves it is essentially expected but if a girl does so it is a serious matter. Expectations are very important in how children behave and our children are raised under the noxious banners that "boys will be boys" and "girls can't do what the boys do and still be a lady". This underlying vision of gender socialization is not a mere accidental preference of many parents. It is connected to the historic privileging of the male gender which provides a wider social space for the male gender. The male exercises the freedom of the public space while the female is considered to be more ideally suited to the private domestic space and is called on to minister to the needs of the males within the private space. The fact that so many women work outside the home does not undermine this conception as evidenced by the fact that women's work outside the home is not equally matched by men's work within the home.

The recently conducted UWI Gender Socialization Project summarized a major tendency in child rearing practices in the Caribbean under the slogan "tie the heifer and loose the bull [Brown 1995; 7]". (See also Brown and Chevannes 1995.) The result of this approach is that boys get less exposure to tasks that would build self discipline, time management and a sense of process [Evans forthcoming, Parry 1995, 1995a]. These deficiencies have been intensified by changes in life styles. The shift from rural living where boys had outdoor tasks such as tying out the goats as well as the reduction in the number of yards that boys would in the past have had to sweep mean that there is much less left of the typically 'male' tasks to be done. Meanwhile there has been less of a reduction in the comparable typically 'female' tasks. Thus the beginnings of male difficulties with the education system are set in place at the very start of a boy's life. In place of discipline and self discipline they are given the license to do as they please.

To make matters worse, as they grow older they are exempted from many of the basic self care and household tasks that girls are obliged to do. Where boys are involved in chores they are often related to the traditional privileging of males embodied in the right to roam the streets at will. Whereas a girl is confined to her home, in the main a boy is allowed to run up and down as he pleases. Outdoor tasks such as going to the shop and running other errands which are more frequently allocated to boys, open the door to a much wider social space than those such as cooking, washing clothes and cleaning the floor which are more likely to be allocated to girls. This division is based on the historical privileging of the male gender in terms of the space that the genders have dominated in patriarchal societies.

The result of this privileging of males is that the upbringing of boys tends to leave them without the basic skills that are needed for educational attainment especially in a school system such as ours. To get an indication of this we just have to consider a listing of some of the tasks that are essential for success within the rote learning system that we have. These include: the ability to sit still and listen carefully to what one is not particularly interested in, the desire to please others, the accustomedness to doing what one has to do rather than what one wants to do, the accustomedness to following what others say rather than pursuing one's own aims, the ability to do uninteresting and repetitive tasks. In general these are not the skills instilled in our boys.

A simple example of this has been suggested in terms of the requirements of female versus male grooming [Sobo 1993; 156]. The most tedious task a boy faces is a trip to the barber once every few weeks. Here he is required to sit still for a few minutes while his hair is removed. Meanwhile his sisters depending on the length/ texture of their hair and the household regime may have to endure an even more taxing process twice a day every day. The privileging of the male gender requires extra care for girls for two reasons and there is evidence from the Gender Socialization Project that girls are taken care of for nearly twice as long as boys. First, girls are expected to be far better presented in public. Second, the taboos about women's bodies and their natural reproductive functions mean that there is a much greater effort made to instill in girls practices of personal care. For example an effort is usually made to introduce girls to the basic elements of the washing of clothes at an early age. This is because the taboos require that a woman must wash her own underwear. At the same time there is no taboo against women

washing a man's garments. Indeed it is not unusual for a girl to be required to wash her brothers' underwear. (See [Sobo 1993].)

An area which is crying out for attention but which I have not been able to touch on here is the issue of social/class differences in the approach to gender. There is some evidence to suggest that it is within the communities of inner city Kingston that the greatest gap exists in the rearing of boys and girls along the direction I have been discussing. The point has been reached now where families are effectively saying that they prefer girls to boys. This is a far cry from the traditional upper class values of the well to do St Andrew dwellers [Leo-Rhynie forthcoming; 19]. The question may well be asked as to how I link opposite practices and attitudes to historical male privileging. In some societies male privileging is manifested by the failure to educate women at all. That is, women are often not even exposed to basic literacy. In such societies male children are openly preferred.

Such societies are very different from ours. Women often never leave the home, their role is entirely domestic and they often have little or no choice in determining their fate in mating/marriage and hence their future domestic role. Once they have left home they have little possibility of returning to help their parents in the future. In such societies sons are preferred as the ones who stay home and assist in the development of the families fortunes. In our society male privilege has manifested itself in a freedom of the male to roam and therefore often never to return but to have his female relatives take care of the home base and any aging or infirm

family members. As this situation intensifies and opportunities for male employment become more risky the attractiveness of girls increases.

A GENDERED SCHOOLING

Starting at a disadvantage boys enter a school system in which the teachers share the same gendered values that the boys face in their preschool socialization. It is very important to start the gender analysis at the very beginning of the formal educational system. Some analyses have focused on later stages in the education process. For example there has been research on the gender biases in high school texts and the performance of children in single sex versus coeducational schools [Hamilton 1985]. All of this is important but it must be clearly understood that the process of gendering in education starts before the child steps into the school room and is from the first day of school a constant factor in determining how students perform in later life.

There is clear evidence that teachers from the outset take a gendered approach to discipline [Evans 1987, 1988]. There are two tendencies that have been observed both of which are likely to lead to male underperformance. For those who seek to discipline the boys there is evidence that they adopt far more brutal methods towards the boys. Such teachers are far more likely to punish boys and in doing so they are far more likely to apply the strap. Combined with this tendency and sometimes separate is an equally pernicious one. That is, teachers so much under pressure from large classes and lack of facilities, often do not even try to instil discipline in boys

taking it for granted that they will be bad. In fact both of these tendencies are rooted in the concept of the male that was presented above.

Thus boys may not receive the more subtle training in self discipline that girls get in school but when they play true to form and get far out of line there is an attempt to literally beat them back into shape. Boys therefore lose on two sides. First, they do not get the training in self discipline necessary for academic success. Second, school becomes an uncomfortable place where they have to suffer the tedium of sitting still all day when much of their previous training was in running up and down. When they behave consistent with their earlier training they are often abused. Both of these disadvantages boys face can be traced back to the historic privileging of the male gender in as far as the school draws on the skills children learn in the private (female) sphere rather than the public (male) sphere. In addition the assumptions about maleness causes boys to be treated in educationally dysfunctional ways in school. As our schools depend more and more on rote learning this manifestation becomes clearer. The teaching styles are geared to children who have all the qualities that girls have been socialized into (often with limited success) and none of the qualities that boys have been socialized into (usually with far more success).

As the boys progress in school they cannot keep pace with their sisters. Girls who are expected home right after school (lest they learn to do what the boys do and get pregnant) and who must stay in the house until released in the morning again for school have little alternative but to do their homework or take up the habit of reading books. It should be noted here that with the

growing availability of television especially the cable stuff female underperformance is likely to follow closely behind that of their brothers. Instead of developing the habit of reading and doing homework girls may now very well be developing the habit of watching soap operas and talk shows. As noted above what we are probably witnessing in terms of male underperformance is a general fall in overall performance with boys' performance falling faster than girls'. As less of the traditional values are passed on to girls and as they watch more and more TV their performance is likely to fall as well. Even then watching TV is a sit still activity. Meanwhile the boys have stayed late at school to play, taken their time to come home just to put down their bag and rush out into the road or onto the playing field. Sometimes with less sleep, often having done less homework and generally with less book exposure, the boys return to school the next day to continue to fall behind.

If this were not enough, male privileging comes to haunt them again. The feminization of the teaching profession has meant that the levels of pay in the profession has fallen dramatically and the status of the profession is not even what it remotely was a generation ago. As males leave the profession education increasingly appears to the boys as a 'woman thing' acquiring in their mind an increasingly low status. The absence of role models and the increasingly 'female' (sit still and listen) methods of teaching along with the chauvinist attitudes of the boys put them at a great disadvantage.

The evidence is there that boys actually actively assert their maleness by resisting school [Parry 1995; 5, 1995a, Evans 1988; 91, 116]. School and particularly certain subjects are seen as

feminine. Male child subculture therefore exerts considerable peer pressure on boys to be disruptive in school and to underrate certain subjects. Unfortunately one of the targets of this subculture is English. The assertion of manliness with its macho values of toughness includes the rejection of English as a more refined, softer, 'feminine' form of communication. Boys are once more at a disadvantage given that English is the language of instruction, especially in higher levels of the school and in the printed instructional materials. This may further be reinforced by male teachers who adopt the same attitude as the boys and who are more concentrated in the more male subjects such as physics [Parry 1995; 5, 1995a].

FACTORS BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATE

The tendency towards male academic underperformance appears to cut across classes but it seems to be particularly marked in the inner city areas. At present there is only anecdotal evidence but the research done for the Gender Socialization Project indicates the extent to which girls in these communities follow the stereotypes suggested above. In addition it is clear that when a choice has to be made it is the girls rather than the boys who are sent to school. All the attitudes that support this behaviour are rooted in the historical privileging of males. In particular the more protective attitude towards girls, the belief that boys need to learn to fend for themselves and the view that girls need to have an education so that they will not be taken advantage of by men.¹¹

While there are few positive role models for the boys within the educational system there are role models for them in the inner city communities. While it is the exceptional teacher who

even has a modest car to drive the boys can witness within their communities men but a few years older than them with all the trappings of modern living. Jewellery, cars, household appliances, the latest in fashions and all the attributes of the life style that go with these. Few of these successful young men have any education to speak of. They may have an incomplete high school education or no high school education worth mentioning but this has not hindered them from acquiring great wealth and street wise status. These are the youths who dominate the street where the boys roam. The values of their working parents, assuming their parents are working people, have little chance of being picked up as the boys are not even home long enough to pick them up.

Within the world of work, recent research by Leo-Rhynie [1995] confirms that women have to be more qualified to get the same jobs as men and that even the most qualified women are finding it difficult to break out and rise above the middle management group that women dominate in some businesses. The motivation is there for women to become qualified and qualified again, but men find other ways of advancing their careers. In fact Leo-Rhynie's pilot study suggests that women are not even doing as well at this level as is popularly believed. Within the organizations studied there are at least two men to every woman from the supervisory level upwards, with six men to one woman at the executive management level, and 11 men to one woman at the level of board of directors.

One objection that might be raised to the analysis above is that it much of it is static. It explains why boys do badly but it does not explain why boys are doing worse considering that here was

a time, not so long ago, when males were out performing females academically. Above I have referred to some dynamic processes but there are a number of others that are worthy of mention. First, the out performance of boys as against girls in the past was in part due to greater restrictions that had been placed on female education. Over time these restrictions have been relaxed. The broadening of opportunities for women in education has promoted, as much as it has been promoted by, the entry of women into careers that were previously dominated by men.

In effect what I have been arguing is that the more the playing field is levelled outside of the home, that is, within the educational system and the job market, the more girls are likely to out perform boys because the girls' home training puts them at such an advantage. This has been intensified by the feminization of education, the devaluation of education by society and the consequent reduction in resources going to education. This has had the effect of demotivating boys and has in addition resulted in the increased tendency towards the use of rote learning methods that do not mesh with boys early gender training. To these factors that are internal to the educational system we need to add those external to the system.

The drawing of women into the work force outside the home has had an effect on society that is yet to be calculated. This is not to suggest that they should be sent back home as some would have it. The problem is that the services they used to provide unwaged to society have not been replaced. Elsewhere I have discussed this in terms of women's contribution to the formation of social capital [Figueroa 1995]. There are fewer hands available to care for children. Men have not taken up the slack and even if they did make a comparable contribution to child care

it is doubtful that the gap would be filled. This is just one aspect of the stress that society is facing. All manner of social interactions, institutions, traditional attitudes and values are facing rapid change. In this context the transformation of gender socialization and gender relations are lagging.

Boys are increasingly left to fend for themselves in keeping with the notions of historical male privileging. In addition, given historical patterns of gender socialization, boys are likely to be even more aggressive and disruptive in a period when social norms are under pressure. Social instability has promoted all the tendencies that make boys perform badly in school while probably having a similar but lesser effect on girls. A relatively greater effort is being made to save the girls in keeping with the historical male privileging notions of the need to protect the girls. The main concern for girls remains their tendency to become pregnant in their teenage years or more generally before they have a suitable level of potential independence or acquired a mate acceptable to the family. The effort to avoid early pregnancy itself leads to more attention for the girls. The concerns for the boys involvement in violence is also strong but many parents given their gender perspectives and socialization practices end up simply hoping for the best. In addition given the gender roles in the home girls become an increasingly important asset for families with single parents or where all the adults work especially if the males are not pulling their weight with respect to domestic chores.

Thus instead of responding to the social transformation that has taken place by insisting that all children pull their weight within the house, relative to boys, girls are increasingly cared for,

prepared for school and in effect preferred although the persistence of the ideology of male privileging makes it difficult for some parents to recognize and admit this. As noted above in traditional rural life there may well have been a more even balance of chores for the boys hence the preference for boys may have been more solidly based.

Beyond the social transformations discussed we need also to examine the increasing role of the media. Many of the negative aspects of gender socialization are being strengthened by media images. The media images of a good life would tend to suggest that it is those involved in the illegal drug trade rather than artisan/working class parents/neighbors and hard working teachers who are living the good life. Along with the image of a good life the media also presents many gender stereotypes that would reinforce the type of macho socialization that boys receive in Jamaica, while failing to present a sufficiently positive image of women. Women still are the underprivileged gender in Jamaica but despite this they have made enormous advances and made contributions in practically all spheres of life including many where men make only a minor if any contribution at all. This is not the portrayal they get in the media. This is in fact a dangerous situation and needs to be corrected as it breeds disrespect and even violence against women of all ages.

What the media does promote is a cult of the 'beautiful' young woman. Much of the advertising and a large part of the programming is focused on this cult. All manner of merchandise is sold and many a film story is told in relation to this 'beautiful' young woman. The ultimate case is

the beauty contest and to a lesser extent the fashion show, and Jamaica is beauty contest and fashion show country.

We might wonder, how have males responded to the situation in which females are outperforming them and gaining access to social spaces that were formally more firmly under the control of males? Above I have noted the response of certain members of the male establishment. Evidence of the response of students is still anecdotal. It is interesting to note that within my own discipline at UWI, economics, I have heard it said by the male students that because the lecturers are almost uniformly male that the female students are favoured. Some women who do well are tacitly accused of sleeping their way to the top.

Beyond these responses there is one particularly interesting one. If the boys are in fact making any new assertion to learn from the girls it is not in a way that is likely to advance them educationally. Faced with their own limited possibilities in the last twenty years boys have sought to take on one aspect of female privilege. This is the privilege of being pretty. Thus if the boys have taken anything from the girls it has been an enormous preoccupation with their appearance. This is not to say that Caribbean males have not always been acutely concerned with their appearance. We just have to think of the proverbial Colon man. What has happened in Jamaica over the last decade is something qualitatively different for a society where the wearing of cologne by a man was seen as a sign of being effeminate just a generation or so ago. Jewellery including ear and other body piercing, elaborate hair styles including chemical processing and dying, the latest styles in clothes and shoes as well as the use of perfumes all

unthinkable within our gendered society a generation ago are now the attributes of our young males.

CONCLUSIONS

Male academic underperformance is rooted in male privileging and the manner in which this has been played out in relation to education in a period of social change and crisis within social relations institutions, values and norms. Any long term solution to the problem must therefore recognize that this is the root of the problem and not any conspiracy to marginalize males of any shade or colour. The problem can be attacked at three levels: the home/community, the school, and the work place. The equal sharing of all domestic task at home will have a salutary effect on boys' school work. As long as boys continue to be marginalized in cooking, cleaning and washing, they are likely to be increasingly marginalized in the class room.

The problem in the class room has elements that go far beyond the gender issue. The fact is that the pedagogical methods used in Jamaican schools leave one to despair. The teacher centered, sit and listen, rote learning, knowledge based, memory driven, over taught, extra lessoned, physically violent, verbally abusive, system we have is just not suited to the development of the type of citizens who can help to transform their country. But this is not a paper on pedagogy.

What this paper does raise is the extent to which the system can accommodate the needs of different types of students who have different types of talents, needs and learning abilities. The case for the change of teaching methods does not even begin to rest on the gender issue. Thus I make the point solely for the purposes of this paper; so long as the system depends on

repetitive rote teaching boys coming out of our contemporary culture will fail to utilize their abilities fully and continue to underperform.

Further, it should be noted that so long as subjects continue to be defined as 'male' or 'female', boys will be at a disadvantage in choosing a career in keeping with their aptitudes. Meanwhile girls will be less constrained as a female doing a 'man's job' is always more acceptable than the obverse. Increasingly, as women 'take over' male subjects, the potential of boys will be more and more limited. Ultimately there will be little that boys can safely do without threatening their masculinity.

The blame for the disgraceful state of affairs in education rests with the entire society. What many teachers do within the resources they have is nothing short of miraculous but it is a bad system, and good teachers ought not to defend it out of loyalty or because of the blood sweat and tears they and their colleagues have put into the system. We have allowed the devaluation of education. Economists must take a special blame for this in as far as they have taught society to value what the market values. The fact is that, the market, as even the economists know, cannot be expected to even begin to give some vague approximation to the value of certain things and one of them is education. Education like child care contributes far more to society than has been recognized. Both are essential to the development of what is now been called social capital. When we devalue education we devalue social capital and we do so at our peril. Education needs more resources of every type. But resources are not everything. Teachers,

parents and students need to be more conscious of gender issues and the way in which gendering operates consciously and unconsciously within the system.

At the work place there needs to be a leveling of the playing field. So long as women have to be more qualified than men for the same job women will have the motivation and men will not have the motivation for study. It is not the erection of but the removal of barriers to the advancement of women that will ultimately stimulate male academic achievement. In the short run a major example of this is the opening up of top posts in boys schools to the best person for the job. It is this type of gender conscious but not gender biased thinking that is required to tackle the problem at hand.

In tackling the problem there are many aspects of the issue that are calling out for careful investigation. Before beginning to consider some of these it is well to note that there is a great deal of research on gender and education, and male academic underperformance that is already ongoing. As such, while there is definitely a need for more research to be done there is also the need for the presentation of a synthesis of existing work. This paper can be seen as a small contribution to such a process.

Despite much ongoing data analysis there are many trends that remain to be unravelled. Trends that appear based on a few data points sometimes fail to hold up when new figures become available. In addition conclusions based on global figures sometimes are contradicted by a process of disaggregation. There is much opportunity as well for comparative analysis,

regionally and internationally. Areas of Latin America appear particularly relevant. (See for example Baker et al [1995?].) Within this context, the question is posed as to whether Jamaica is as extreme a case as the research for this paper has indicated? Another comparative concern relates to the process of the feminization of the teaching profession in Jamaica. How does it relate to similar trends from other global areas and the policy framework under which it took place?

Some data already exists on how boys and girls spend their time but there is need for more careful analysis if we are to base our conclusions on gender socialization on a firm foundation. Differences in attitudes towards gender and gender socialization between different social strata call for study. Along with this there is need to see how gender issues relate to social class, race and shade as well as rural-urban differences within the home, the class room and the world of work. In this regard attitudes need to be considered, in particular the extent of the sophistication of gender concerns, and the extent to which the male marginalization myth occupies the consciousness of students, teachers, and the wider community.

Research relevant to what takes place within the class room is also of importance. Foremost among these are methods by which we can get the education processes and its pedagogical approach to respond to different learning styles, different abilities and different intelligencies. To what extent have exceptionalities already been granted to boys and what have been the consequences. The entire discourse within the classroom needs to be interrogated to ascertain its true gender content and effect. To what extent do boys and girls have different

developmental paths, what is behind these and how should the curriculum be ordered to take this into account if necessary?

Within the world of work, what are the specific mechanisms that allow men to get ahead despite their academic underperformance? How are the skills requirements developing and how well does the contemporary process of gendering prepare boys and girls for their adult careers? In particular given the ways boys and girls grow up today will they be ready for a transformed labour market?

Methodologically the research on gender difference needs to be more dynamic looking at the factors that determine how the performance of each gender is transformed over time. In this regard it is important to go beyond a comparison between the performance of the two genders to an understanding of the processes that are affecting each gender. It is appropriate to compare the genders. It is also important to understand the dynamic interaction between the genders and see how one gender may affect or be affected by changes in the gender profile of the other. Beyond this it is important to understand that the genders react to factors outside of gender. We need to see what factors are affecting each gender because changes that are taking place in society may affect each gender disproportionately. We can see this in relation to the issues discussed in this paper. Ultimately it is the differential impact of social processes on the two genders, some very long term and some of more recent vintage, that has brought us to the point of male academic underperformance.

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NOTES

1. I am using male academic underperformance to mean a failure to achieve the same level of entry, passes and distinctions as females do within programmes of study at the various levels of the educational system.
2. My argument is not that maleness has been an advantage at every moment (of time and space) in Jamaica's history. It is also not based on an insistence that current gender socialization practices generally privilege boys over girls. Those who agree with my assessment of contemporary gender privileging may find greater support for my arguments but differences of opinion on the extent to which gender relations have been transformed are not central to my discussion. In particular, differences of opinion as to whether male or female children are now being privileged in their upbringing do not affect the core of my argument. Male privileging may in fact still be the norm, it may in fact be the norm within different social groups and not others, but this issue is not central to my basic argument.
3. Throughout the paper the term "feminization" is used essentially in a quantitative sense, implying there are more women than men where formally the opposite was true. I am not therefore using the term with any deeper meaning such as a flip from male to female values or the like.
4. Most of the ideas in this paper are not original. Even where I have come to an idea myself someone else has usually put forward the idea previously in academic or popular work. I have sought to mention the source of my ideas where relevant and to acknowledge others who have come to the same position as me. No doubt, there is much work in the field of which I am unaware. It is my hope that these will be brought to my attention by my readers. In writing this paper I had the research assistance of Diana Thorburn who also contributed some ideas of her own.
5. Evidence has been collected to demonstrate that Jamaican females outperform males from the earliest grades [NAP], at the end of primary school [Buttrick], at the end of high school [Leo-Rhynie, Bailey, Whiteley 1995, Hamilton 1985] and at the tertiary level [Whiteley]. There are certain exceptions to the general rule of superior female performance some of these are in fields which traditionally have a very strong male bias. This distinction is discussed below. In addition I understand that Errol Miller has shown that boys do better in some primary subjects not tested in the Common Entrance Exam but I have not yet seen this work.
6. I have looked at academic work or public commentary by: Buttrick [1992] on the common entrance examination, Odette Parry [1995, 1995a] at the high school level, Whiteley [1994, 1995,

1995a] on science subjects at the high school and university levels, and Boyd Carey [1993] on the tertiary level. I am also aware of academic/policy work or commentary by: Errol Miller at various levels, Dennis Minott on the CXC, Claire Bernard of the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) Peter Espeut, the World Bank, and a number of others but did not have the opportunity to review their work in preparing the statistical analysis for this paper.

7. All statistics on UWI are taken from **Official Statistics** [UWI various years].

8. I am concentrating on Jamaica for two reasons. First, it seems to be the most extreme Caribbean case in terms of male underperformance. Second, there seem to be significant differences between territories and these could not be unravelled in the time available. It should also be noted that the data is being analyzed with one major gap unplugged. This is the gender distribution of Jamaican students studying abroad. Given that there may be an equal number of students studying abroad the gender balance could be quite different from the one identified here.

9. This is consistent with the work of Handa [1995]. Based on human capital assumptions his econometric analysis of the Survey of Living Conditions in Jamaica shows that women have a much higher rate of return to investment in education. That is, relative to women, men get less out of improving their educational status.

10. I understand that the research has been done to show this but I have not seen it myself.

11. The most dramatic evidence that I have seen for this is a report that of the 180 students in the 1994 graduating class for Tivoli Comprehensive more than 130 were girls [Daily Gleaner July 5, 1994]. Whereas Trench Town Comprehensive also tends to follow the national trend the neighboring Charlie Smith Comprehensive is quite the opposite with male registrations out pacing female registrations by 318 to 185. This dramatic deviation from national trends is yet to be explained but removal of promising girls from this very violence prone area and the fact that the catchment area for this school may have other more prestigious options for girls may be explanatory factors [Conversation Mark Figueroa/Paulette Chevannes - principal of Charlie Smith, January 1, 1996].

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